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SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report of the United States/Canada Division (1987-1992)

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

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Since the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1987 representatives of the USA/Canada Division have met three times on a formal basis in Washington, D.C.: in June 1988, November 1989, and September 1990. On various other occasions USBGN and CPCGN representatives have met in a more informal way in association with other geographical names activities.

Several areas of divisional cooperation since 1987 may be mentioned.

In response to generally expressed concerns, BGN and CPCGN continued the work of studying features which are common to both countries but are identified by different names. Consensus was reached in 1988 and a document was signed by the chairmen of the two geographical names boards indicating cooperation, and the establishment of a mechanism to reduce possible confusion in feature identification. The document identifies a number of principles and procedures in naming which, while aiming at standardization of feature names, draws attention to the appropriate recognition of local cultural and historical factors involved in naming. The agreement recognized the important role of the International Boundary Commission of Canada and the United States in disseminating official geographical names information through its maps of the border area. Consequently, the BGN/CPCGN agreement encouraged the Commission to undertake a new series of boundary maps to replace those of the early decades of the century. A pilot project map for a small section of the international border was prepared by Energy, Mines and Resources Canada. Names of places and features in Canada and the United States were jointly discussed and reviewed at the colour proof stage by BGN and CPCGN staff.

In the field of automated names processing, documents and information have been exchanged on national programmes. The BGN has also provided information on its practices for writing names of features in countries outside the USA/Canada Division.

Resolution 22 of the Fifth Conference relates to Aboriginal/Native Geographical Names. The national names authorities of the United States and Canada have exchanged information and documentation on the collecting and processing of aboriginal names. In 1989, the USBGN issued a pamphlet pertinent to this methodology for native American geographical names and the CPCGN is just completing the provisional edition of a manual for the field collection of native Canadian toponyms.

Various projects of general interest to UNGEGN activities have been undertaken with collaboration of divisional representatives.

- In cooperation with the ad hoc UN Working Group on Evaluation, the significance and utility of existing UN resolutions have been reviewed and general concurrence reached on aims and goals which should be addressed by UNGEGN.

- A complilation of names and contact addresses of national names authorities is being prepared for UNGEGN.

- A small collection of documents has been assembled as a "training kit" for English-language UN toponymic training courses.

- The resolutions from the first five UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names have been compiled into a compendium of resolutions grouped by subject areas. Both English- and French-language texts have been stored on computer to facilitate future updating.

- Representatives of the Division have participated in instructing at various toponymic training courses outside North America.

The United States and Canada continue to cooperate on toponymic issues on an ongoing basis, and exchange documentation, as appropriate, to encourage and enhance national toponymic standardization programmes.